

April L. Holder-Freeman. The Role and Portrayal of the Villain in Children's Fantasy Literature: A Content Analysis. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. April, 2012. 49 pages. Advisor: Brian W. Sturm

Latent content analysis was performed in this study to discover whether there are differences between how male and female fantasy writers depict their villains in children's high fantasy literature. Specifically, this paper examined three aspects: to determine any gender stereotypes that the authors perpetuate in the depiction of the villain; the nature of the villain's power; and the level of conflict between the villain and the protagonist. To gain a breadth of material to work from, twelve books were chosen for this study, published between 1960 and 2010. A total of eighteen villains were examined, nine males and nine females, written by six female authors and six male authors. This paper uncovered no gender-related differences in how male and female fantasy writers created their villains. All villains portrayed masculine gender stereotypes, with minor differences found between female writers and male writers regarding the nature of the villains' powers.

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THE ROLE AND PORTRAYAL OF THE VILLAIN IN CHILDREN'S FANTASY
LITERATURE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

by
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I. Introduction

Since the publication of Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland in 1865, interest in and the popularity of children's fantasy literature has steadily risen, although the genre became more widely recognized with the publication of such works as C. S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia, beginning with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, in 1950 and J. R. R. Tolkien's seminal Lord of the Rings trilogy. Additionally, scholarly interest in children's fantasy seems to be on the upswing since the wild success of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series and Philip Pullman's controversial His Dark Materials trilogy. At first seen as escapist literature with very little value beyond entertainment, there is growing support among literature critics of the importance of fantasy as a genre, especially for children. Egoff states that "the purpose of fantasy is not to escape reality, but to illuminate it: to transport us to a world different from the real world, yet to demonstrate certain immutable truths that persist even there—in every possible world" (as cited in Lynn, 2005, p. xviii). For example, these created worlds are usually peopled with universal archetypes children can understand, such as the hero or villain, although it is obviously the hero or heroine of the story that the child is meant to identify with. These stories usually consist of ethical and other dilemmas, woven into the storyline, which may help illuminate solutions for the child struggling with those same issues in his or her real life. It is also in these different worlds that difficult subjects, such as death, might be more easily broached to children than in other genres, without seeming pedantic. Fantasy writer Lloyd Alexander (1971) remarked that

...fantasy offers no such escapes from life. It can refresh and delight, certainly; give us new vision; make us weep or laugh. None of these possibilities constitutes escape, or denial of something most of us begin to suspect at a rather early age: that being alive in the world is a hard piece of business. (p. 582)

1. High Fantasy

Fantasy as a genre is defined as “works in which nonrational phenomena play a significant part. That is, they are works in which events occur, or places or creatures exist, that could not occur or exist according to rational standards or scientific explanations” (Tymn, Zahorski, & Boyer, 1979, p. 3). This study focuses on a subgenre of fantasy which was developed in the late 1960s and the 1970s, called high fantasy, or alternatively, heroic or secondary world fantasy. Lynn (2005) defines this subgenre succinctly: “the fate of the world hangs in the balance, while the forces of good and evil, or light and darkness, battle for control of humanity” (p. 289). These stories are set in a complex, imagined world where magic and supernatural powers are real and a reluctant hero’s quest often involves the discovery of his true identity and magical powers, which are the keys to destroying the forces of evil.

For the purposes of this paper, all of the novels examined fell under one of Lynn’s (2005) three subheadings: Alternate Worlds or Histories, which are stories set entirely in a secondary world; Myth and Legend Fantasy, retellings of myth and stories of contemporary involvement in myth; or Travel to Other Worlds, stories in which a character from the real or primary world visits a secondary world.

2. Problem

While there is a growing body of scholarly research on children’s fantasy literature, that research has centered on the heroes and heroines of such stories, their

characteristics, and their journeys of self-fulfillment and self-discovery. There is currently a lack of research solely targeting the portrayal of the villains of children's fantasy literature, and I have been unable to locate any which analyze the villain through the lens of an author's gender. The villain is a crucial character in the story, next in importance only to the hero and heroine, for without something or someone to struggle against, there is arguably no story to tell. Without a villain, the hero and heroine would not have the impetus to discover their true identities or reach their full potential as productive members of their society.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine these aspects of the villain in children's high fantasy fiction: to determine any gender stereotypes that the authors perpetuate in the depiction of the villain; the nature of the villain's power; and the level of conflict between the villain and the protagonist. My intent was to add to the body of scholarly literature examining children's fiction and to create a better understanding of the villain in juvenile fantasy literature. The results of this study benefit current and future children's librarians in that it complements existing literature on the heroes and heroines of juvenile fantasy fiction and it aids in their readers' advisory services by increasing their understanding of the content contained in their fantasy collections.

II. Literature Review

There is a growing body of literature examining children's fantasy fiction. With the extreme popularity of fantasy series such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, and the recent movie adaptations of C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (as well as continued interest in these series) scholarly research in children's fantasy seems to be increasing. However, there is a lack of research solely focusing on the image and role of evil—usually manifested as the “villain”—in children's fantasy literature. Much of what has been published concerns the heroes and heroines of that genre, typically covering what is known as the “hero's journey,” or a journey of self-discovery and self-fulfillment. Because of this dearth in prior research on villainy, this literature review will examine the research that exists on children's fantasy literature, what it constitutes, why such literature is important for children, and how children think of fantasy. This review is intended to lay the groundwork for my content analysis study which broadly examined the depiction of the villain in children's fantasy literature.

My literature search was conducted using JSTOR, ProjectMuse, Springerlink, Academic Search Premier, Library Literature and Information Science Full Text, PsychInfo, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, and Education Full Text. I also searched online journals such as *School Library Journal*, *Horn Book Magazine* and *Library Trends*. Google Scholar was also useful in locating material. My search terms were “children's fantasy literature,” “villain,” “evil,” “villain/hero high fantasy,” “villain/hero

stereotypes,” “good and evil,” “hero and villain” “juvenile fantasy fiction,” “content analysis,” and all the different variations of these terms.

My master’s paper is a latent content analysis of selected children’s high fantasy literature. Krippendorff (2004) offers a succinct definition of content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 18). Because of this, I thought it would be important to find a research article that clearly delineated the methodology which might inform my own process and help me develop my own rubrics in the examination of the literature. Taylor (2003) designed a content analysis study of children’s books for his sociology students. Specifically the author examined gender stereotypes found in Dr. Seuss books. Taylor began by laying the theoretical background of the study, in this case the cultural ideologies, values and beliefs that were communicated in children’s literature. After a short literature review, he set down the learning objectives and the methodology of the content analysis exercise he gave to his students, clearly explaining the steps of a content analysis study and suggestions for future replication by researchers. Taylor concludes that content analysis of children’s books is a “useful tool” that can be “easily adapted to other media and other ideologies and stereotypes” (309). His specific study, while not directly related to my topic, provides the clear, concise steps to accomplish a content analysis of children’s books and a sample rubric that may be used as part of my own methodology.

Bloomer (1968) also conducted a content analysis study. He examined 46 children’s books to determine the factors that made certain kinds of books more attractive to children than others, chosen by the children themselves without any adult influence.

These books were taken from three elementary school libraries and divided into groups of 23 books—those with high circulation numbers and those with low circulation numbers. He analyzed the personality dimensions of the heroes and villains in these books, based on the “Identification Figure Test (Bloomer, 1964)...[which] uses an anchored judgment scale for rating 17 variables adapted from Symonds (1949)” (p. 101). To handle control issues, Bloomer chose books which were published within four years of the experiment and, with the help of the school librarians, those books which had not been mentioned by the librarians or teachers or used in any book-talks. The findings show that children tend to choose books with high degrees of conflict between the hero and the villain. Further, that the conflict in these books was a “function of the essential evilness of the villain rather than any change in the rather standard hero” (p. 105). Bloomer contends that the children find the high circulating books more interesting in part because these villains were more appealingly realistic in how they opposed the hero in the story.

Barbara St. John’s (1973) dissertation sought to uncover the very core of what makes a villain by looking at the portrayal of evil in children’s realistic and fantasy fiction. St. John analyzed thirty-six realistic and fantasy books, all Newbery Award or Newbery Honor books. Her objectives were to analyze the conflict between good and evil in selected children’s literature published between 1945 and 1972; compare the nature of evil as portrayed in fantasy with the portrayal of evil found in realistic fiction; and to survey children’s literature experts, such as children’s fantasy authors, on their conceptions of evil and its role in children’s fiction. She found that the definition of evil really came down to individual perception and that a reader’s background and personal experiences, values and morals, would influence what he or she recognized as evil, be it

in the form of a person or some other force. A child is also limited in his or her experiences and so would distinguish evil differently than an adult might. In many of the Newbery Award and Newbery Honor books, complex evil characters were drawn in a variety of ways which might preclude a child reader, without much prior experience in making sophisticated inferences and judgments from text alone, from recognizing evil in its many forms. In the fantasy literature in particular, authors seemed to rely on evil portrayed as stereotyped characters, which made them easily identifiable. However, her analysis brought home the concept that children are more likely to identify evil if their perceptions of it have already been influenced by background and personal experiences.

Clear-cut characterization to the point of stereotypical “goodies” and “baddies” in fantasy literature is not a bad thing, however. Fantasy may provide a safe emotional distance for children to explore themes that may seem too harsh or painful. But what exactly does children’s fantasy fiction constitute? And how does it benefit children? Gooderham (1995) discussed children’s fantasy literature in terms of two existential interpretations: that of Ravenna Helson, who approached juvenile fantasy as a Jungian theorist, and Erik Erikson, who analyzed children’s fantasy literature as a Freudian. For his purpose of proposing an “anatomy” of juvenile fantasy literature, Gooderham chose to follow Erikson’s approach, which allowed for a more comprehensive interpretation of the texts under review. Gooderham identified five central themes, or elements, that exist in juvenile fantasy literature: “fantasy of wish fulfillment; fantasy of control; fantasy of venture; fantasy of competence; and fantasy of devotion” (p. 176). These elements shape the many and varied metaphors within the “body of texts” that comprise children’s fantasy fiction.

While this article broke down the central themes found in children's fantasy literature and used Erik Erikson's theory of child developmental growth to explain how it benefits children, there are specific elements found in children's fantasy literature that may also help children make connections between their world and the invented fantasy world. Baker (2006) studied the geography as described in selected children's fantasy literature and discovered there were certain correlations that emerged where it concerned the gender roles of heroes and innovative plot structures. Baker examined four different "maps" in these selected fantasy stories: the literal map of these invented worlds; the metaphysical, or philosophical, theological and political map; the map of gender; and the narrative, plot, overturned vantage point or comedy map (238/239). Baker contended that these different maps in fantasy literature may indirectly help children in determining their own journeys and relationships in the real world.

Specifically targeting evil as portrayed by villains, Kokorski (2010) examined the image and role of villains in selected contemporary fantasy literature for children and young adults, making her one of the few who have written from this perspective. In her research, Kokorski found that villains are stereotypically portrayed to symbolize pure evil, with their ultimate purpose to demonstrate the central dichotomy between good and evil in the heroes' struggle against them. Using the examples of the White Witch from the C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, J. K. Rowling's Voldemort in her *Harry Potter* series, and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Kokorski scrutinized how the heroes were driven to develop their full potential and strengths by these powerful villains. Without these villains, she concluded, there would be no need for a hero to rise up to overcome them, and arguably, no need for the story at all.

Taking a different tack altogether, Ingalls (2010) examined the roles that sex differences played in the creation of the heroes in children's fantasy fiction. Her study of eighteen books—nine by male authors and nine by female authors—used an evolutionary psychology approach to understand certain hero characteristics. Based on these theories, Ingalls hypothesized that female authors would create heroes with strong family relationships and/or ties, as opposed to male authors. Ingalls discovered that male authors were more likely to create heroes with dysfunctional or no family relationships. On the other hand, female authors tended to provide siblings with positive relationships to their heroes. They also tended to have their heroes save a family member as their primary motivation. These findings corroborated “the predictions generated by sexual selection and inclusive fitness theory” (346). While Ingalls's study focused on the heroes of selected children's fantasy literature, her theories could also apply to the creation of the villains in these stories, who may exhibit certain characteristics depending on the gender of the author.

There is no unified agreement among scholars, however, that such fantasy elements do help children in making connections to reality from the invented fantasy world or help in determining their own journeys through the real world or work out relationships with their family and peers. In fact, no agreement exists about whether children can even differentiate between fantasy and reality at all. Woolley (1997) reviewed previous research on children's and adults' understanding of fantasy in order to oppose the often-expressed claim that children cannot differentiate between reality and fantasy. To do so, Woolley defined two dimensions of fantasy: “fantastical thinking” or “magical thinking” and “thinking about fantasy” (p. 992) and utilized previous research

findings to answer several questions. These questions ranged from what children believe about the behavior of certain physical objects, for example, to their beliefs about fantastical entities. As opposed to these beliefs, Woolley pulled in evidence from previous research to address the adults' perspective on these same issues. Woolley concluded that the differences between children's and adults' beliefs are due to "continuous rather than discontinuous development" (p. 1009), which revised the claim that children are not able to differentiate between reality and fantasy.

Morison and Gardner (1978) also conducted a study to examine children's awareness of fantasy as opposed to reality and to see how they used it to classify the cultural, media, and other worlds around them that were beyond their personal experience. Twenty children, from two similar schools and from similar backgrounds, were chosen to participate in this study. Half were male and half were female, from four different grades: kindergarten, second, fourth, and sixth. The materials included three-card items, which featured "familiar pictures" taken from children's coloring books. The children were shown a series of these pictures and asked to pair them, with an explanation as to why they chose whatever pairing. The researchers discovered that the children's use of fantasy classifications for these pictures increased with age. They also discovered that young children were less likely to categorize figures as real or fantasy, unless they were given explicit instructions to do so. However, these findings are subject to a variety of variables, including media exposure, their knowledge of labeling practices, as well as other isolated factors, such as "the frightening aspects of certain fantasy figures may motivate children early on to master their reality status" (648). While the researchers found that children are able to differentiate between reality and fantasy, the

level and ability to describe that distinction varies with the child and his or her personal experience.

In summary, prior research on children's fantasy literature has seemed to be almost exclusively focused on the heroes and heroines of such texts. There is also a great deal of research that has gone into scrutinizing the elements of fantasy fiction and how it is meant to relate to the real world, and how such symbolism may benefit the developing child. What is still needed, however, is a more in-depth research into the other archetypes of fantasy fiction besides the heroes and heroines—archetypes such as the villain. A greater examination of this necessarily evil character will help to foster a greater appreciation and understanding of the role of the villain in children's fantasy literature, as it is arguably the single most important plot element besides the hero. A powerful villain—one that seems almost impossible to defeat—must be in place to serve as the impetus for the hero to strive and overcome his initial limitations and/or hesitation. It is only once he has defeated the villain that the hero comes into his own and takes his rightful place in his society. Moreover, a greater understanding of the villains, heroes and heroines, and other fantasy archetypes will also benefit children's librarians in readers' advisory services and collection development. Additionally, continued scholarly interest serves to strengthen children's fantasy literature as a literary genre in its own right.

III. Methodology

1. Methodology

This study utilized the methodology of latent content analysis. Wildemuth (2009) says that “content analysis can describe a message pool...[and] can be used to infer or predict outcomes or effects of messages” (p. 298). The term “messages” in this instance refers to any recorded information. In my study, the recorded information was children’s high fantasy literature. Wildemuth states that latent content is “conceptual and cannot be directly observed in the messages under analysis” but goes on to say that “latent content characteristics can be measured using manifest indicators...[which are] manifest content characteristics that are assumed to indicate the presence of latent content” (p. 299). These manifest indicators in the selected novels were identified, coded, and analyzed according to my coding rubrics. In short, I was concerned with analyzing the underlying meaning of the texts, rather than analyzing the surface content.

2. Research Questions

My study attempted to discover whether there are differences between how male and female fantasy writers depict their villains in children’s high fantasy literature, specifically:

1. To determine any gender stereotypes that the authors perpetuate in the depiction of their villains;
2. The nature of the villains’ powers;
3. The level of conflict between the villains and the protagonists.

3. Selecting texts

To determine which children's high fantasy books should be analyzed for this study, I culled a selection of novels from Lynn's (2005) Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults: A Comprehensive Guide, Fifth Edition. Because I wanted to focus on a breadth of material rather than depth, I chose novels published from 1960 to 2010 and only chose one novel per author. After reading the synopsis of each novel on Amazon.com, NoveList, or the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database to identify the main villain of each story, I then narrowed the field down by male and female villains, as written by male or female authors. If a book was part of a series, the book where the villain (or villains) played a substantial role in the plot was chosen, regardless of where the book fell within a series, and if it met the requirements of publication date and villain's gender. If a book possessed both a male and female villain, it qualified for analysis and I analyzed the traits of both as they were portrayed in the novel.

Twelve high fantasy books by twelve different authors were finally selected from the lists. Most of these books fell within the 1960s, the 1980s, and the 2000s, with one book, The Dark Lord of Pengersick, originally published in 1976. I reviewed the depiction of male and female villains by six female authors, and the depiction of male and female villains by six male authors, to determine the answers to my research questions above.

4. Final list of books chosen for this study

The following are the chosen books that met the criteria of children's high fantasy and were published within the specified publication dates by both male and female writers. The books on this list were subjected to latent content analysis. In the case

where a secondary villain was identified, usually of the opposite gender, that villain was also included in the study.

Female Authors

Female villains:

Diana Wynne Jones, Howl's Moving Castle. Villain: the Witch of the Waste.

Jean Ferris, Once Upon a Marigold. Villain: Queen Olympia.

Male villains:

Joan Aiken, The Whispering Mountain. Villain: Lord Malyn.

Both male and female villains:

Ellen Kindt McKenzie, Taash and the Jesters. Villains: Lady Ysene, head witch of a coven; her brother, the Duke of Xon.

L. J. Smith, The Night of the Solstice. Villains: a wizard named Cadal Forge; a sorceress named Thia Pendriel.

Lene Kaaberbol, Shamer's Daughter. Villains: Drakan; his mother, Dama Lizea.

Male Authors

Female villains:

Terry Pratchett, The Wee Free Men. Villain: the Queen of the Fairies.

Male villains:

Richard Carlyon, The Dark Lord of Pengersick. Villain: the Lord of Pengersick.

John Flanagan, The Ranger's Apprentice: The Burning Bridge. Villain: Lord Morgarath.

Both male and female villains:

Alan Garner, The Weirdstone of Brisingamen. Villains: a shape-shifting sorceress named Selina Place, also known as “the Morrigan”; a dark wizard named Grimmir.

Lloyd Alexander, The Book of Three. Villains: the Horned King; Queen Achren.

Laurence Yep, Dragon of the Lost Sea. Villains: a witch named Civet; a wizard only known as “The Keeper.”

5. Procedure and coding rubrics

Because my texts were full-length novels, the villains displayed a wide variety of behaviors throughout the stories. Rather than coding specific instances of a behavior each time they occurred, I wanted to get at the core of the personality of the villains. In their research study, Evans and Davies (2000) advocated this approach as this would give a more “holistic portrayal of the main character or characters throughout the story, not just individual incidents in the story” (p. 261). For the purposes of my paper, I utilized the following male and female gender stereotypes and their definitions (see Table 1).

Included in the Appendices are examples of the coding rubrics which were utilized in this study. Appendix A is the coding frame for recognizing female and male gender stereotypes that the villain portrayed as he or she appeared in the novel.

Appendix B is the form used to gather information on the villain within the context of the novel.

Table 1: Male and Female Gender Stereotypes with Definitions

Female Gender Stereotypes	
Stereotype	Definition
Submissive	Easily yielding to power or authority; marked by submission or humble and ready obedience.
Dependent	Relying on something or someone else for support; unable to show initiative.
Emotional	Easily affected by emotions and displaying them openly.
Intuitive	Immediately apprehending a situation or someone's motives without knowing why.
Timid	Easily frightened; lacking boldness or courage.
Sensitive	Easily wounded by unkindness; occasionally, ready to take offense.
Attractive	Displaying qualities or an appearance that others find interesting, engaging, pleasing, winning, or alluring.
Unintelligent	Deficient in intelligence or intellect; dull, stupid.
Passive	Following another's lead and not being active in a situation.
Weak	Wanting physical strength or strength of purpose; readily bending.
Cooperative	Willingness to work with others to achieve the same end.
Male Gender Stereotypes	
Stereotype	Definition
Domineering	Having or exerting a commanding or imperious manner in order to control a situation or a person.
Independent	Not depending upon the authority of another; self-governing, autonomous.
Analytical	Able to break down a situation into its elements and develop a strategy to address the problem.
Risk-taker	Willing to take a chance on personal safety or reputation to achieve a goal.
Insensitive	Not caring about the feelings of others; having no conscience about how one's actions affect others.
Argumentative	Capable or fond of arguing; belligerent.
Assertive	Taking charge of a situation by making plans and issuing instructions; aggressively self-assured.
Strong	Physically powerful; able to exert great muscular force.
Ambitious	Full of ambition, thirsting after honor or advancement; aspiring to high position.
Competitive	Desire to "one-up" another; prove oneself better or more capable in some way than another.
Aggressive	Actions and motives with intent to hurt or frighten; imparts hostile feelings.

6. Scope and limitations of the study

An impressively high number of fantasy books are being published every year. Because of this, I elected to limit my content analysis study to those novels designated as “high fantasy” and whose intended audiences are children and/or the pre-adolescent population (ages 9-12), keeping in mind that some children tend to read above their grade level and generally like to read novels about protagonists that are close to their age or above it. Due to time constraints, my research was limited to twelve books by six male authors and six female authors from 1960-2010. A larger sampling of high fantasy books written by male and female authors portraying male and female villains covering the decades of the 1970s, the 1990s, and into 2011 and beyond would no doubt serve to further, and more accurately, answer my research questions.

Another limitation is that no one author’s works were studied in-depth and only one book in a series was examined. I also deliberately selected books for this study without regard to whether it had won any awards or not. My intention was to find books that any child may come across in the public library while browsing the shelves. However, the chosen books from the 1960s might now be a bit difficult to find, as public libraries, generally, consistently weed to discard materials that are out of date or are no longer popular. In some cases, the books may have just reached the end of their usable life, but have since gone out of print, making it difficult to procure replacement copies. Nevertheless, I included these novels in my study as I wanted to analyze villains over several decades.

Further, the coding rubric used in this study was adapted from studies which looked at male and female protagonists. Because most male gender stereotypes are

inherently “stronger” than feminine traits, this rubric may not be the most effective way to measure a villain, who must be a powerful character in order to provide conflict for the hero.

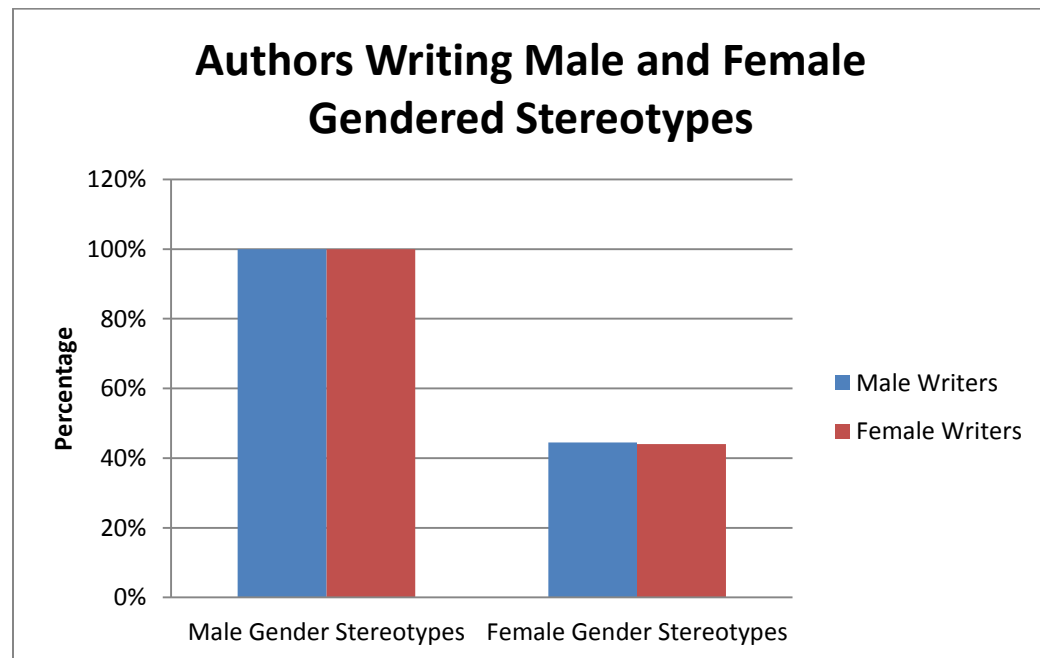
This study also focused on latent content analysis and does not discuss manifest content analysis. Wildemuth (2009) defines manifest content as that which “exists unambiguously in [a] message. It is easily observable and countable” (p. 298). To gain a more complete image of the villains in my texts, I had to take into account their varying behaviors and dialogue in order to recognize the overall personalities of the villains. This required decoding the texts, seeking meaning beyond the printed words, which would allow me to find the answers to my research questions. As manifest content analysis only examines the surface content of texts, this would not have served my purpose.

IV. Analysis

The twelve authors in my study were divided equally by gender: six females and six males. Of the eighteen villains that were portrayed by these authors, nine were female and nine were male. Divided by the gender of the authors, the male authors created a total of four female villains and five male villains, while the female authors created a total of five female villains and four male villains.

My first research question focused on how male and female authors depicted their villains, specifically, if they portrayed gendered stereotypes (see Graph 1).

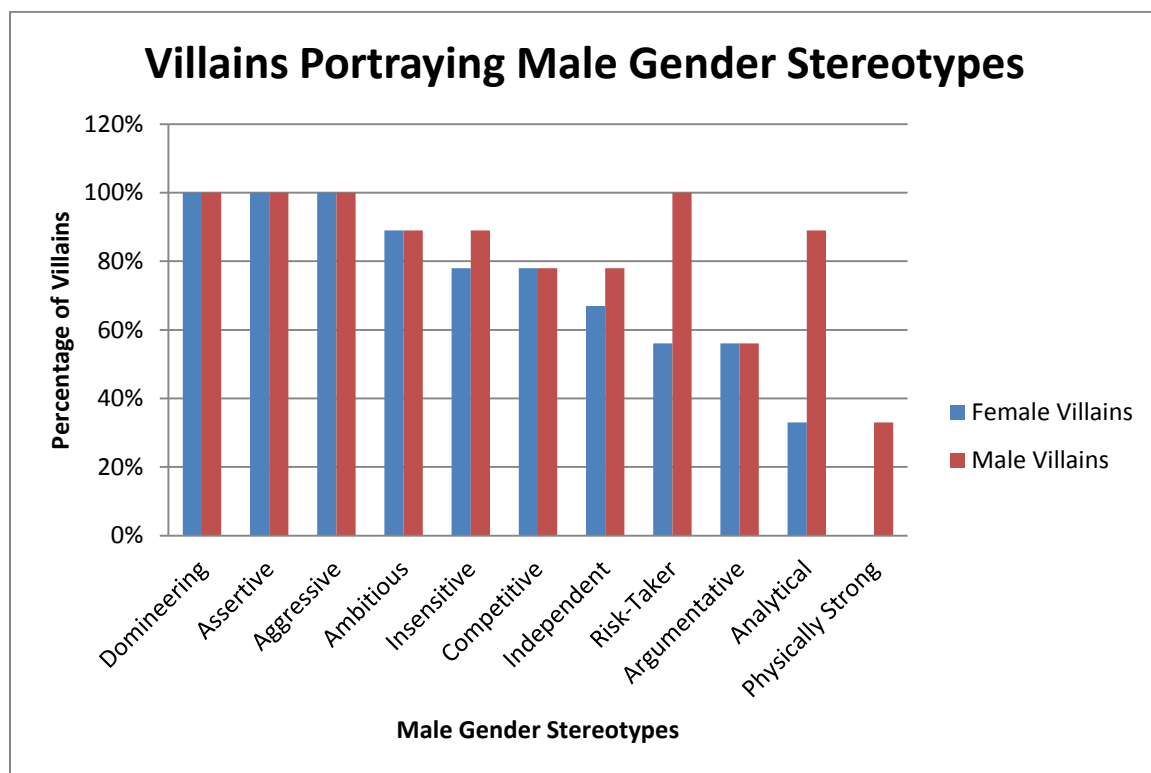
Graph 1



I found that all twelve writers portrayed villains with male gender stereotypes. Interestingly, an equal number of writers depicted villains with female gender stereotypes: four female authors and four male authors.

The majority of the villains—all eighteen, both male and female—heavily displayed male gender stereotypes (see Graph 2).

Graph 2

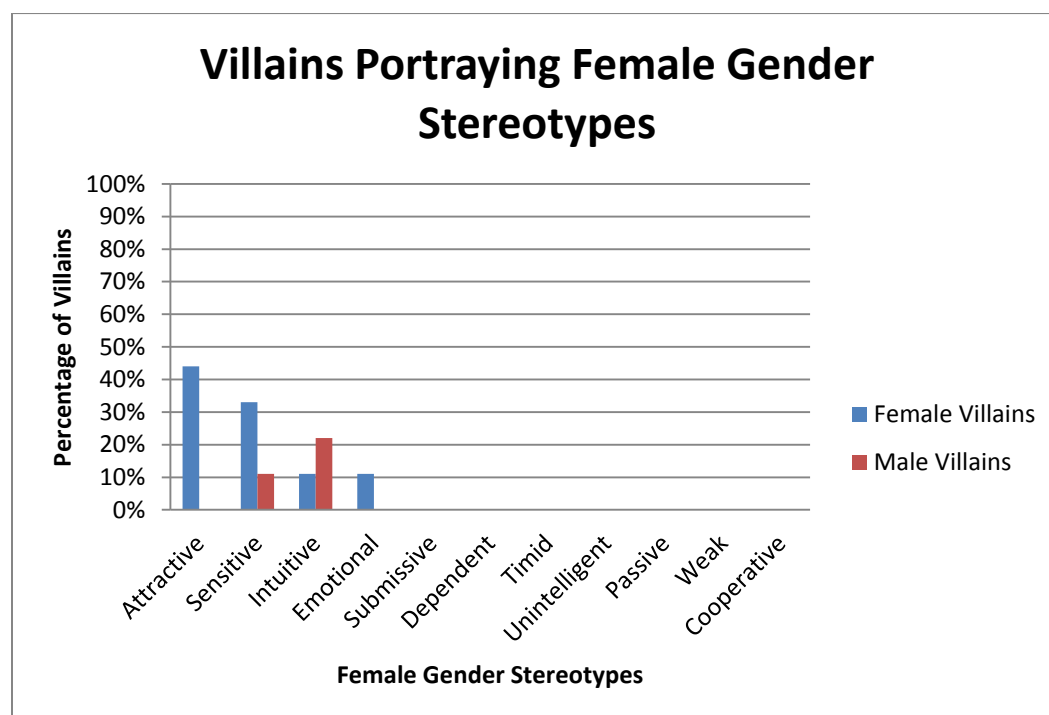


In all categories, the male villains displayed more male gender stereotypes than female villains. It is certainly interesting to note that all eighteen villains depicted “Domineering,” “Assertive,” and “Aggressive” behaviors. In six of the eleven male gender traits above: “Domineering,” “Assertive,” “Aggressive,” “Ambitious,” “Competitive,” and “Argumentative,” the number of male and female villains portraying those characteristics were equal. None of the female villains were described as

physically strong, although only 33% of all nine male villains were described and portrayed as such. There is likewise a substantial difference in the number of female villains portraying the “Analytical” male gender stereotype: 33% of female villains to 89% of male villains. Only 56% of female villains portrayed the “Risk-Taker” trait compared to 100% of the male villains.

Graph 3 shows the results of all eighteen male and female villains who portrayed female gender stereotypes.

Graph 3

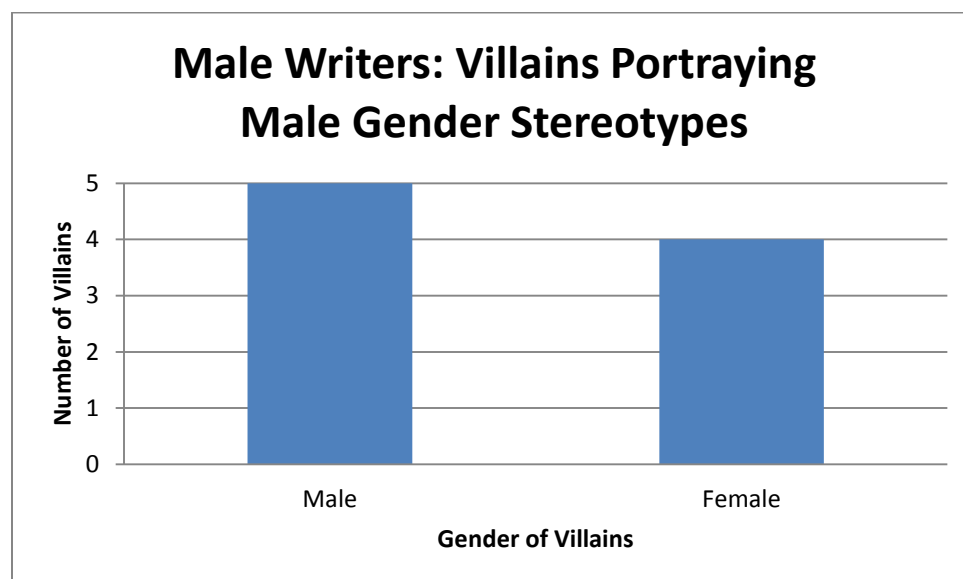


It is interesting to note here that, of the nine female villains, 44% were portrayed as having beauty or attractiveness as being important to them, while none of the male villains were portrayed as desiring it as an asset. There is also a substantial difference between male and female villains concerning the “Sensitive” female gender stereotype, with 33% of female villains displaying an overly sensitive attitude compared to one male

villain. 22% percent of the male villains displayed the “Intuitive” female gender stereotype, compared to one female villain, while only one female villain out of nine female villains openly displayed her real emotions.

The male authors in this study created five male villains and four female villains. Graph 4 shows the number of these male and female villains who displayed male gender stereotypes.

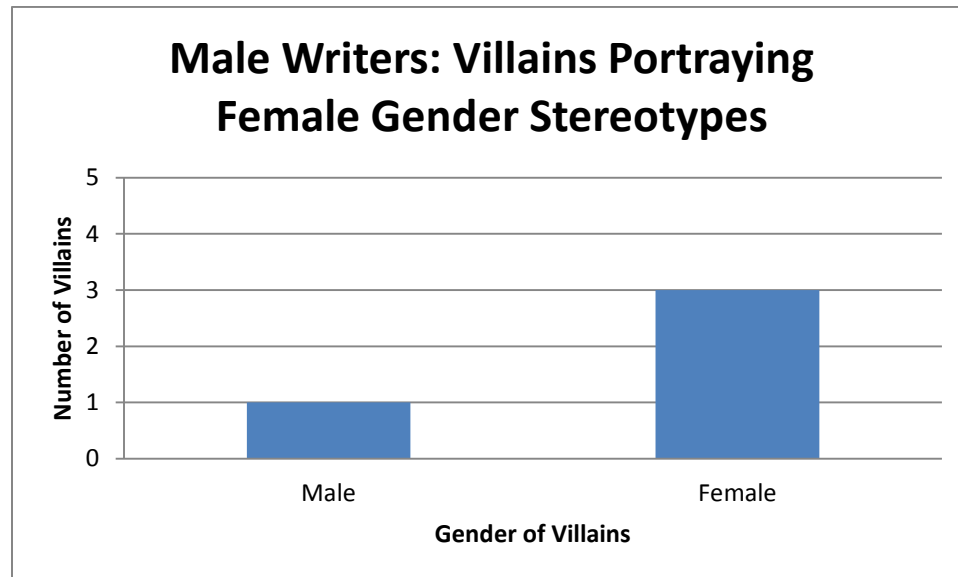
Graph 4



The male writers in this study used one or more male gender stereotypes to describe 100%, or all nine of their villains—five out of five male villains and four out of four female villains—making no distinction between the male and female gender of the character.

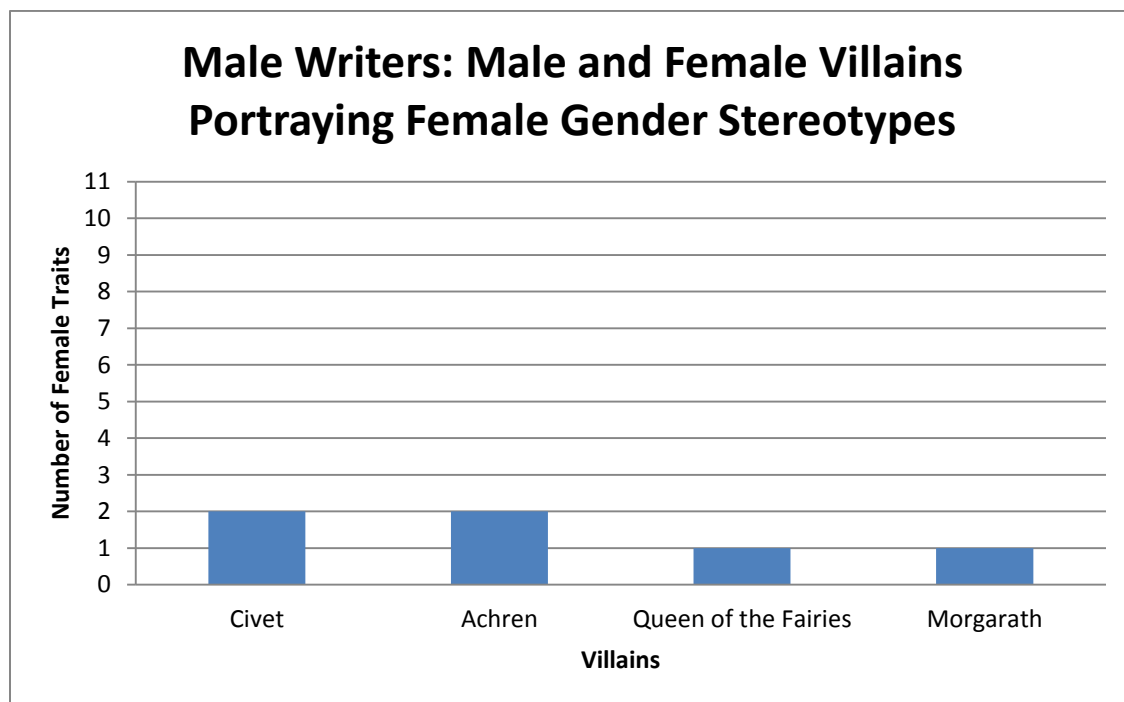
By contrast, Graph 5 shows the number of these same male and female villains who portray female gender stereotypes, all written by these male writers.

Graph 5



These male writers gave 75% of their female villains, or three out of four, at least one or more female gender stereotypes. Of these three female villains, one displayed the “Emotional” and “Sensitive” female traits; one displayed only the “Attractive” trait; and the last displayed the “Sensitive” and “Attractive” traits. Only one out of five male villains, or 20%, possessed a female gender trait, which was that of being “Intuitive” (see Graph 6).

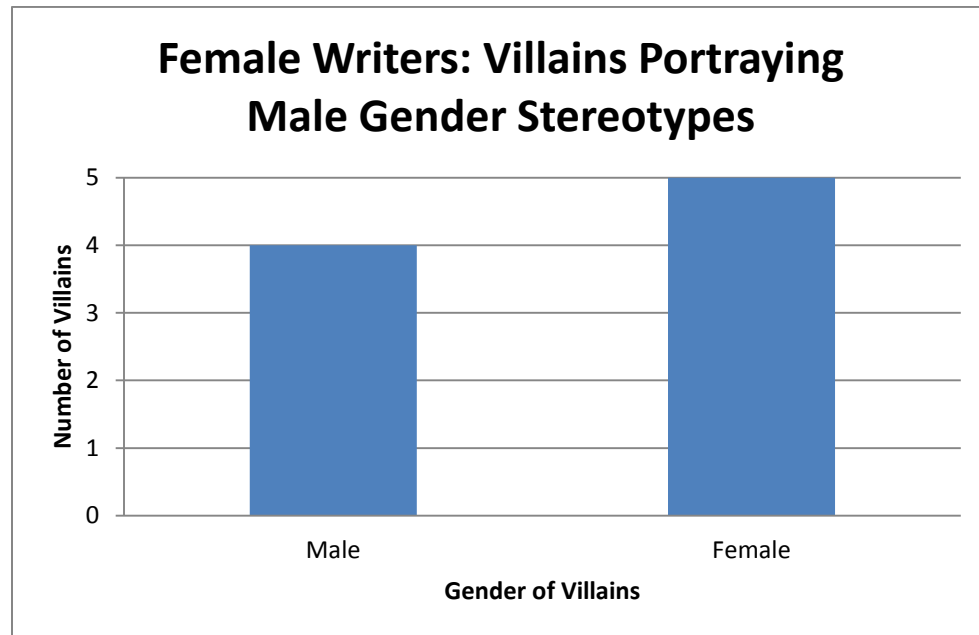
Graph 6



The female writers of this study wrote four male villains and five female villains.

Of these nine villains, 100% displayed male gender stereotypes (see Graph 7).

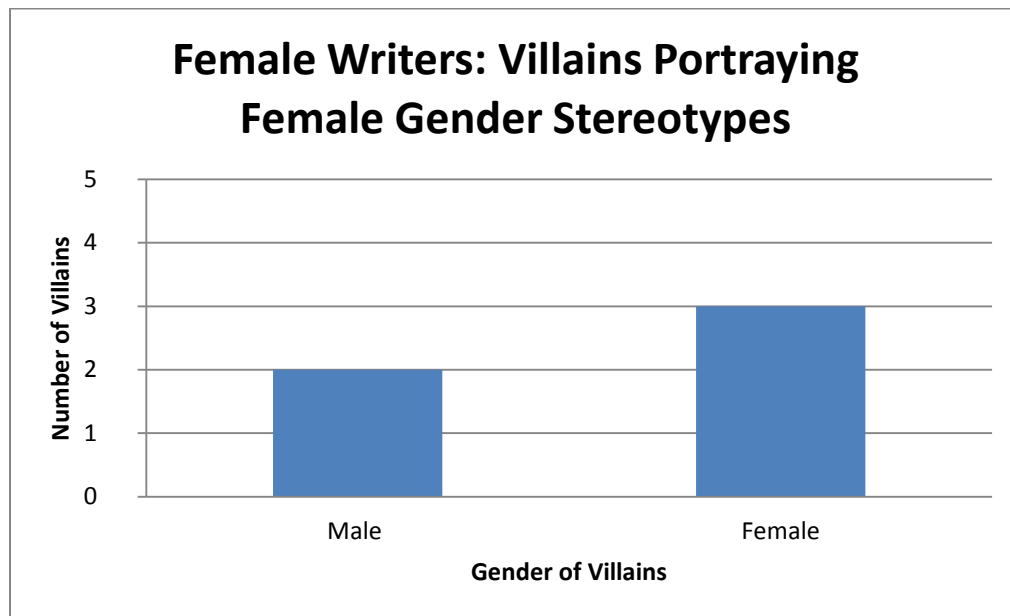
Graph 7



Again, seemingly without making a distinction between the male and female gender of their villain characters, these female authors used one or more male gender stereotypes to portray all of their villains—four out of four male villains and five out of five female villains.

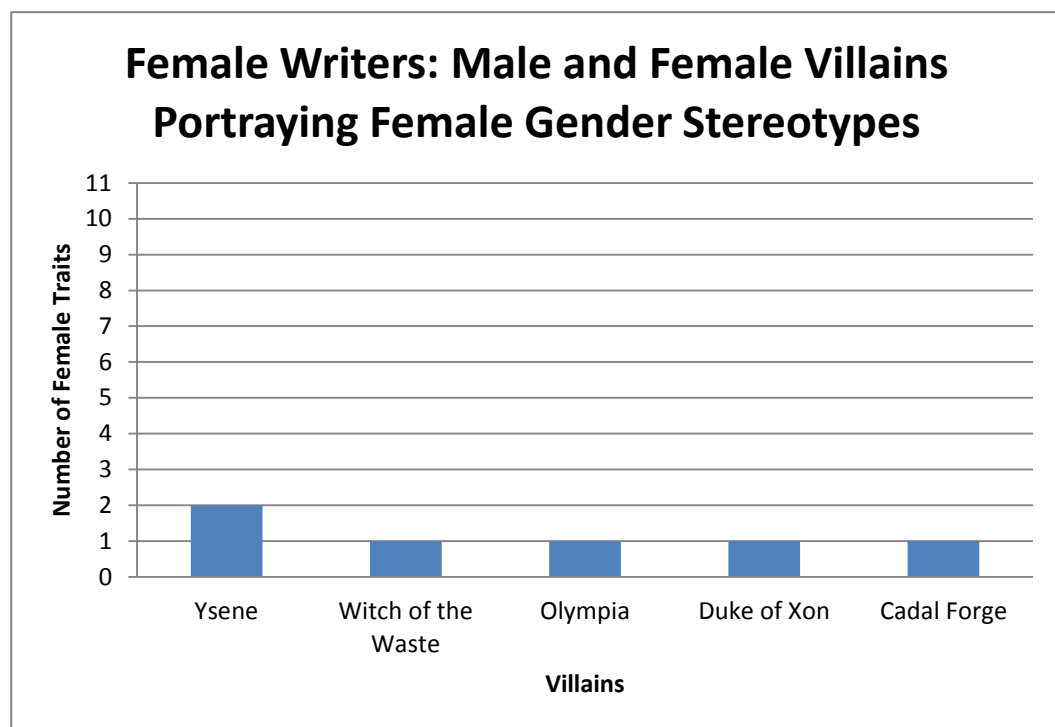
In contrast to male writers, the female writers used slightly more female gender stereotypes to portray their male villains (see Graph 8).

Graph 8



Two out of four of the female authors' male villains displayed female gender stereotypes: one displayed the "Sensitive" trait while the other displayed "Intuitive." 60% of the female villains portrayed female characteristics, or 3 out of five. Two displayed the single trait "Attractive" while one displayed both "Intuitive" and "Sensitive." Interestingly, most of these male and female villains who did portray feminine characteristics possessed only one trait (see Graph 9).

Graph 9



Looking at the nature of the villains' powers produced some interesting results. Male authors gave eight out of nine villains magical powers—both male and female villains. There was one exception, a male villain, who used only his physical prowess against the protagonist.

By contrast, female writers gave magical powers to only four out of nine villains, or 44% versus the male writers' 89%. Only one male villain written by a female author possessed magical powers, while three out of five female villains used magical powers against the protagonists. Of those villains who did not possess magical abilities, one male villain relied on his physical prowess; two male villains used their authority and wealth; and two female villains used their authority to present obstacles for the protagonists.

As to any differences in the level of conflict between the villains and the protagonists created by male and female writers, the data collected proved inconclusive. Interestingly, all the female writers created male villains who appeared repeatedly throughout the stories, creating a high level of conflict. The female writers' female villains were split: two of the five provided high levels of conflict, while three provided only periodic conflicts in the novel, usually in the middle and again at the end.

As for the male writers, two out of the five male villains produced high levels of conflict, while three created low levels. The female villains were evenly split: two of the four were repeatedly interacting with the protagonists, while two made only periodic appearances.

V. Discussion

When I began this study, I had originally thought that I would find greater gender stereotypical differences in the ways male and female fantasy writers portrayed their villains. I knew that I would find very powerful male and female villains, as a strong adversary would be needed for the purposes of conflict within the story; however, I did not expect my findings to be so polarized. Perhaps it is not so surprising to find so little of the female gender stereotypes portrayed, considering the inherent “weakness” in most of the feminine traits: “Submissive,” “Dependent,” “Timid,” “Passive,” and “Weak” to name the most obvious ones. Just a cursory glance at the male gender stereotypes of “Domineering,” “Aggressive,” “Strong,” “Competitive,” “Ambitious,” would make one see how well suited *these* adjectives are to describing a villain than the aforementioned female gender traits.

Yet, in looking at these female villains, could they have been portrayed otherwise than with heavy doses of stereotypical male traits? Could these male and female fantasy writers have convincingly provided conflict with a female villain solely created out of traditional female gender stereotypes? My findings argue that this is not possible. Instead, I rather envision the female villain much more likely to *pretend* to be “Weak” or “Timid” in order to manipulate others to achieve her goals.

I found it interesting that the only female gender stereotypes used to describe female villains are not inherently weak in themselves: “Attractive,” “Sensitive,” “Intuitive,” and “Emotional.” The trait “Attractive,” especially, falls in neatly with the

oft-used fantasy trope of beautiful but wicked women, but the number of female villains who employed or relied on their beauty was surprisingly low overall and it is evenly split between male and female fantasy writers. Perhaps this is indicative of a shift away from the use of this obvious fantasy trope.

It is concerning, however, that there were great discrepancies found between male and female villains in two of the male gender trait categories: “Analytical” and “Risk-Taker.” Only 33% of female villains portrayed a tendency to be “Analytical.” This discrepancy between the male and female villains might perhaps be seen as perpetuating the stereotypical female gender trait of “Unintelligent,” as no male writers described their female villains as analytical versus three female writers who did. As for the masculine trait, “Risk-Takers,” only 56% of female villains displayed this stereotype compared to 100% of the male villains. Only two male writers described their female villains as such, while three female writers portrayed their female villains this way. Perhaps these are indications of the women’s liberation movement, where the female writers are taking the lead in moving even their female villains as far away as they can from female gender stereotypes.

However, there is another way to look at all of these female villains. All of them portrayed ten of the eleven male gender stereotypes—all the masculine traits except for (physically) “Strong.” Could these female villains really be male villains with a thin veneer of “femininity” pasted on and adjusted according to the specific plot? By this, I mean a masculine/male villain is given a female body, which then somehow equals less physical strength. But why *not* give female villains a measure of physical prowess as well? Why should these female villains possess all male traits except for physical

strength? It is mere speculation on my part, but this last might be a telling indication of how our society currently views physically strong women.

As to the nature of the villains' powers, my findings showed an interesting leaning towards a possible gendered approach when it came to an author giving his or her villain magical powers. The male authors gave eight of their nine villains—male and female—magical powers, while only one male villain relied on his brute strength against the protagonist. On the other hand, the female writers only gave magical powers to four out of nine villains: one male and three females. One possible explanation for this may be that the female writers sought to display a greater disparity of power between their magical villain and the non-magical protagonist. To battle against a magical adversary requires a deeper, more heroic struggle in order to equalize and eventually overcome the larger power imbalance.

Since the collected data proved inconclusive regarding the level of conflict within the story, I can only suggest that the writer, regardless of gender, used the villain as they deemed it appropriate to their plot. What is certain is that, in the design of a villain, male gender stereotypes lend themselves to conflict and the villains portrayed in these novels represented wicked and relentless forces that were meant to be struggled with and eventually vanquished. Both male and female writers recognize the value of a forceful villain, a confrontational villain, to move the plot along as well as provide the impetus for their heroes and heroines to develop their full potential.

VI. Conclusion

My intention in conducting this study was to help foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the role and portrayal of the villain in children's fantasy literature. Without such powerful adversaries, the protagonists would have no impetus to grow and change, and the story ceases to be a story, at least, one filled with meaning and interest.

My findings suggest that there is no difference in how male and female writers of high fantasy children's fiction create their villains, at least in terms of gendered stereotypes. All villains need strong characteristics in order to create the conflict needed to drive the plot—and masculine gender traits provide those strong characteristics. It is my belief that any male or female villain possessing the majority of female gender stereotypes would not be able to effectively and convincingly create obstacles for the hero.

In many ways, the villain is not only essential to drive the plot, but also to provide the perfect foil to showcase the hero or heroine's ultimately superior qualities. Lloyd Alexander (1971) writes,

The fantasy hero is not only a doer of deeds, but he also operates within a framework of morality. His compassion is as great as his courage—greater, in fact. We might even consider that his humane qualities, more than any others, are what the hero is really all about. (p. 583)

The villain, by comparison, is frequently depicted as having no humane qualities left—he or she is repeatedly shown as utterly ruthless, heartless, and selfish in the single-

minded determination to achieve his or her goals. It is worth mentioning here that these qualities—ruthless, heartless, and selfish—are very male stereotypical traits.

This clear-cut dichotomy of “good versus evil” frequently found in fantasy fiction might seem too obvious to adults, but for the child, the unambiguous and explicit portrayal of evil in its many forms might actually be helpful. Ursula Le Guin (1989) rejects fantasy as pure escapism, claiming that it is instead the best language for children to begin to delve into the complexity of the inner self. Evil is not a mere “problem” with a clear-cut answer;

That is escapism, that posing evil as a ‘problem’, instead of what it is: all the pain and suffering and waste and loss and injustice we will meet all our lives long, and must face and cope with over and over and over, and admit, and live with, in order to live human lives at all. (p. 59)

It is my hope that this study helps to strengthen children’s fantasy literature as a literary genre in its own right, one with powerful messages and meaning for children.

VII. Suggestions for Further Research

There is still a great deal of research that can be done in the fantasy genre and on the archetype of the villain in particular. A more in-depth study into the villains portrayed in series fantasy fiction might produce interesting findings in terms of “the villain’s journey” throughout the series. Do they change at all, as the hero changes, as the story progresses?

It would also be interesting to contrast the villains found in children’s fantasy literature with those found in teen and adult fantasy novels. Do the villains still heavily portray masculine gender stereotypes? Are villains less clear-cut “baddies” than is found in children’s fantasy fiction? Are more female gender stereotypes portrayed by female villains in teen and adult fantasy?

Another study could delve into the topic of physically strong female villains. Are there any present in the fantasy genre? Do they exist in other genres, in science fiction, or realistic fiction, perhaps? What does the scarcity of physically strong villainesses say about our current society?

Looking at the gendered stereotypes of villains in other genres could prove meaningful as well. How do male and female writers portray villains in these other genres? Comparing the findings of that study with this one could provide some interesting insights into the concept of the villain in literature.

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¹ Originally published in 1968.

² Originally published in 1964.

³ Originally published in 1976.

⁴ Originally published in 2005.

⁵ Originally published in 1960.

⁶ Originally published in 1986.

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⁸ Originally published in 1968.

⁹ Originally published in 1987.

Appendices

Appendix A
Example of coding frame for examining the gendered stereotypes of villains.

Bibliographic information:

Villains:

Coding Frame: Female Gender Stereotypes		
Stereotype	Definition	Appeared in story
Submissive	Easily yielding to power or authority; marked by submission or humble and ready obedience.	
Dependent	Relying on something or someone else for support; unable to show initiative.	
Emotional	Easily affected by emotions and displaying them openly.	
Intuitive	Immediately apprehending a situation or someone's motives without knowing why.	
Timid	Easily frightened; lacking boldness or courage.	
Sensitive	Easily wounded by unkindness; occasionally, ready to take offense.	
Attractive	Displaying qualities or an appearance that others find interesting, engaging, pleasing, winning, or alluring.	
Unintelligent	Deficient in intelligence or intellect; dull, stupid.	
Passive	Following another's lead and not being active in a situation.	
Weak	Wanting physical strength or strength of purpose; readily bending.	
Cooperative	Willingness to work with others to achieve the same end.	
Coding Frame: Male Gender Stereotypes		
Stereotype	Definition	Appeared in story
Domineering	Having or exerting a commanding or imperious manner in order to control a situation or a person.	
Independent	Not depending upon the authority of another; self-governing, autonomous.	
Analytical	Able to break down a situation into its elements and develop a strategy to address the problem.	
Risk-taker	Willing to take a chance on personal safety or reputation to achieve a goal.	
Insensitive	Not caring about the feelings of others; having no conscience about how one's actions affect others.	
Argumentative	Capable or fond of arguing; belligerent.	

Assertive	Taking charge of a situation by making plans and issuing instructions; aggressively self-assured.	
Strong	Physically powerful; able to exert great muscular force.	
Ambitious	Full of ambition, thirsting after honor or advancement; aspiring to high position.	
Competitive	Desire to “one-up” another; prove oneself better or more capable in some way than another.	
Aggressive	Actions and motives with intent to hurt or frighten; imparts hostile feelings.	

Appendix B

Example of the form used gather information on the villain within the context of the novel.

Title of book and publication year:
Author:
Setting of story:
Plot summary:
Name of the villain:
Description of the villain as the story opens:
Magical powers, if any:
Main goal of villain:
Main protagonist (hero of story) and age, if listed:
How the villain is defeated at the end of the story:

Appendix C

Synopsis of high fantasy titles used in this study

The Whispering Mountain. Aiken, Joan.

During the imaginary reign of King James III, Owen Hughes, the hero, is sent to live with his cantankerous grandfather in Pennygaff after the death of his mother. His grandfather finds the legendary Harp of Teirtu and there ensues a great dispute over the ownership of the valuable golden harp, with the sinister Lord Malyn heading the top of the list. He will stop at nothing to possess the artifact, cost him what it will in resources and cunning. As Owen puzzles over the prophesy of the harp, he and his friend Arabis know they must prevent the harp from falling into Lord Malyn's clutches. After a series of dramatic events, enlivened by a cast of colorful characters, Lord Malyn is defeated and the true owner of the harp is discovered to be none other than Arabis herself.

The Book of Three. Alexander, Lloyd.

Taran, Assistant Pig-Keeper of the oracular pig, Hen Wen, must find her when she runs in terror from the Horned King, evil Arawn's new warlord. Thus begins the high adventure Taran has been longing for, although his quest must ultimately be abandoned in order to save Prydain from the forces of the Horned King. Capture by wicked Queen Achren separates Taran from his hero, Prince Gwydion, but unites him with Princess Eilonwy, bard Fflewddur Fflam, the strange creature Gurgi, and the dwarf Doli. Together they carry on Lord Gwydion's task to warn the House of Don at Caer Dathyl of the Horned King's marshaled forces, since they believe the prince to be dead. They finally reach Caer Dathyl only just ahead of the Horned King's men and the Horned King himself gives chase. He shatters Taran's sword and Gwydion arrives just in time to save Taran's life.

The Dark Lord of Pengersick. Carlyon, Richard.

Mabby Trenoweth and her friend Jago are determined to rid their land of the evil Dark Lord of Pengersick who terrorizes the villagers in the absence of the missing Earl. Mabby steals the Dark Lord's ring, reasoning that it must hold his power. She hides it and the Dark Lord exercises his wrath on the luckless villagers. She and Jago hatch a plan to defeat the sorcerer and, using a spell book that she had also stolen from the Dark Lord, Jago sets out on a journey to gather the powers of the sun and the moon in his wand. He returns, and with the help of Mabby and his elf allies, he battles the Dark Lord and his forces and succeeds in defeating him. He and Mabby are also instrumental in breaking the enchantment of the missing Earl, who is restored to his human form.

Once Upon a Marigold. Ferris, Jean.

Christian runs away from his family at an early age and ends up living with Ed the forest troll for 11 years. During these years, he discovers he has knack for inventing...and he also discovers the Princess Marigold in the nearby palace. When Christian contacts her by pigeon mail (p-mail), the two strike up a friendship and Christian falls in love with her. He takes on work in the castle, watches the awkward wooing of two unenthusiastic suitors to the Princess's hand, and uncovers Queen Olympia's sinister plot to kill bemused, doting King Swithbert and unsuspecting Marigold. There are plenty of twists at the end, but the young couple is finally and safely wed.

The Ranger's Apprentice: The Burning Bridge. Flanagan, John.

In this second volume of the series, the kingdom of Araluen is preparing for the upcoming war with Morgarath and his forces. Apprentice ranger Will is sent out on a simple mission to Celtica to remind the Celtic king of his sworn loyalty to Araluen and is accompanied by Horace, his battleschool apprentice friend and another Ranger, Gilan. Instead, they discover that Morgarath's Wargals have already decimated Celtica. They rescue a princess-in-disguise, Evanlyn, and Gilan leaves to warn the King of what has befallen Celtica. While he is gone, Will and the others stumble upon a secret that could spell the doom of Araluen and ensure Morgarath's victory. Will and his friends succeed in disrupting Morgarath's plans for an ambush of the king's army, and Horace challenges Morgarath himself to a duel to the death. Although Horace defeats the evil lord, not all ends well as Will and Evanlyn are carried off by Skandian mercenaries before Halt can rescue them.

The Weirdstone of Brisingamen: A Tale of Alderley. Garner, Alan.

Brother and sister, Susan and Colin, are visiting her mother's old nurse Bess and her husband Gowther in Cheshire. Many years ago, Bess had given Susan's mother a bracelet containing a beautiful stone, and which is now Susan's. She calls it her Tear, but it is in fact Firefrost, the Weirdstone of Brisingamen, and it is the source of the magic that is keeping a king and 140 of his knights in an enchanted sleep. These knights will be the only ones who will be able to finally defeat Nastrond, the Great Spirit of Darkness. Two of his minions, Selina Place, otherwise known as the Morrigan, and Grimmir, a dark wizard, decide to steal Firefrost and use it to their own ends and it is up to Susan, Colin, and the good wizard Cadellin to prevent this from happening, with the help of Gowther and two fierce, fighting dwarves.

Howl's Moving Castle. Jones, Diana Wynne.

Sophie Hatter is the eldest of three daughters in a land where being the eldest is quite a misfortune...and her bad luck is soon proven when she unwittingly brings down the wrath of the wicked Witch of the Waste on her head. The witch transforms her 17 year old body into that of an elderly woman and Sophie must find a way to break the spell. Her only chance seems to lie with the mysterious Wizard Howl in his constantly-moving castle, his fire demon, Calcifer, and his helpful apprentice Michael. But Howl

has his own problems with the Witch of the Waste, and it takes all of their combined efforts to destroy the witch and restore order to the kingdom.

Shamer's Daughter. Kaaberbol, Lene.

Dina is the daughter of a Shamer, although she does not want her gift. She considers it more of a curse as no one will befriend her. Then her mother is called away to uncover the culprit of a triple murder in the neighboring town of Dunark—and doesn't come back home. Drakan brings the unsuspecting Dina to Dunark where her mother is being held in order to blackmail the older woman into convicting an innocent man, Nicodemus, as the culprit. As Nicodemus was the son of the murdered Castellan, he would have inherited the title and land. With the secret help of friends who oppose Drakan's rule, Dina and Nicodemus find a way to save her mother from Drakan and escape Dunark.

Taash and the Jesters. McKenzie, Ellen Kindt.

Taash, an orphaned boy, is caught up in a web of intrigue plotted by the Queen's wicked stepsister, the Lady Ysene, who wants to take over the throne to co-rule with her brother, the Duke of Xon. With the help of two jesters, Kashka and Piff, an elderly good witch named Bargah, and other characters, Taash helps to defeat the Lady Ysene and her brother and learns that he is actually the long-lost brother of King Aciam.

The Wee Free Men. Pratchett, Terry.

Tiffany Aching's younger brother Wentworth is stolen by the Queen of Fairies. Armed with an iron skillet, nine-year-old Tiffany must use all her determination and growing witch skills to battle the Queen's nightmarish monsters and not only save Wentworth from the Queen but her beloved home on the Chalk. A clan of tiny but fierce blue-skinned pictsies called the Nac Mac Feegle, or Wee Free Men, help her along the way.

The Night of the Solstice. Smith, L. J.

The four Hodges-Bradley children, Alys, Charles, Janie, and Claudia, must work together in order free Morgana Shee from her prison in the Wildworld so that she can fight the evil sorcerer Cadal Forge, who, along with other powerful sorcerers, plans to invade the Stillworld and enslave humankind. The children learn to rely on each other and discover their own talents in the process. At the end, they manage to free Morgana and, with her, join in the final battle to prevent the sorcerers from entering the Stillworld. Cadal Forge becomes trapped in a mirror and only Thia Pendriel manages to evade escape with a powerful magical gem in her clutches, leaving the story open for a sequel.

Dragon of the Lost Sea. Yep, Laurence.

For hundreds of years, Shimmer, an exiled dragon princess, has been searching for Civet, the powerful witch who stole her dragon clan's inland sea. Just as she locates her, she runs into a mistreated orphan boy, whom she saves from his abusive master—but in the ensuing uproar, Civet vanishes. The grateful boy persuades Shimmer to let him join her quest and she reluctantly does so. On their journey to track down Civet again,

the two fight the evil wizard, the Keeper, and his terrible pets in an air-battle. They ultimately track down Civet in her lair inside the Weeping Mountain where she is finally defeated, with the help of the Chinese mythology hero Monkey. But instead of killing her, Shimmer takes pity on her and resolves to have her face the High King of the Dragons.